



The Filioque Collar: The History of the Western Clergy Suit & Why The Orthodox Cannot Wear It

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Many of us have seen Orthodox Christian Bishops, Priests, and Deacons wearing what is often called by Latin Papists as the "Roman Collar," or by Protestants as the "Dog Collar." This western clergy suit generally consists of a modern style all black suit coat and pants with a small but distinctive white square tab located at the center of the neck. It is most often associated with Roman Catholic Priests thanks to popular western culture and their depictions in many famous Hollywood movies that revolve around Roman Catholicism, such as the famous 1973 block buster hit, *The Exorcist*. In addition, many of the so-called high church Protestant denominations such as Anglicanism and Lutheranism will often see this worn among their clergy.



Turkish Born Archbishop Elpidophoros (Lambriniadis)
Wearing the Filioque Collar

However, this western clerical collar historically does not have its origins within Latin Papalism at all but in the 19th Century Church of Scotland's Presbyterianism. In 1894, the Glasgow Established Presbytery called a public meeting of all their clerics to discuss multiple issues within their religious confession. One of these issues was the "use of vestments" within the Church of Scotland. Included in this conversation were Thomas Somerville, Anton Kilsyth, Robert Thomson and Doctor Donald McLeod. The conversation concerning the use of vestments was opened by Thomas Somerville who "proposed the motion of which he had been given notice, that members of [the] Presbytery attending ordinations be requested to wear their gowns and bands. He made the motion, he said, principally on the ground that there should be uniformity in the matter. At present some members came with their gowns and bands while a good many more did not. Besides being an academic symbol, the gown was a symbol of self-respect, of respect of the Church, and respect to the people amongst whom a minister was officiating" [1].

In the synopsis of the meeting that was published in the Glasgow Herald on Thursday, December 6th, 1894, there is a brief conversation where Doctor Donald MacLeod discusses the white clerical collar which he states it "was known as the 'dog collar'" [2]. The entire conversation concerning the Scottish Presbyterian discussion is as follows:

(Mr. Anton speaking, about the Church of England:) Not only in the Prayer Book, but by Acts of Parliament, they had settled the question of what robes should be used by the officiating clergymen. Before they could go into this motion of Mr. Somerville they must settle the preliminary question of what were the robes sanctioned by the Church of Scotland.

Mr. Robert Thomson – None.

Mr. Anton said that was just the point upon which he wished to fix the attention of the Presbytery. They could not compel any person to use any vestment in the Church of Scotland, and it was beneath the dignity of the Presbytery to pass a resolution which they could not enforce. He questioned very much if the Geneva gown had any ecclesiastical sanction at all. Every vestment was of Pagan origin. If he was wrong, it was for the fathers and brethren to correct him. The Geneva gown lent neither beauty nor dignity to the form of the preacher. Did they imagine that the proportions and appearance of their friend the minister of Govan would be improved by wearing a Geneva gown.

Mr. Robert Thomson – It would.

Mr. Anton said that in his opinion neither the dignity nor the appearance of the wearer was improved by the Geneva gown. The Geneva gown must have been brought into use by people who never considered that the clergy of the Scottish Church were to consider oratory as a fine art. That was the position they occupied with regard to the Geneva gown, and it appeared to him that the wearing of the Geneva gown in a lawless manner, as they had been doing, was a witness of the patience, and a witness of the longsuffering of the people in the Church of Scotland. He was not speaking against vestments. He was speaking strongly in their favour, and he wished that the Presbytery should take the present opportunity of seeing that they went into the matter thoroughly, with the view of securing that the clergy really did appear in pulpit and at ordinations in proper vestments. They should take into consideration at the present time the wearing of regular dress not only by the preacher, but also by the pastor. He had no sympathy with those preachers who walked about the streets in the garb of laymen. When a minister was going about his work in his parish he should wear such a distinctive dress that the people should know not only that he was not a dissenting minister – (laughter) –

Mr. Robert Thomson – Oh, dear me!

Mr. Anton said that he could not imagine anything calculated to do more good than that, when they were going about their visitations, they should, as captains and soldiers of the army of the Church militant, be in the eyes of all men identified by their uniform as belonging to that Church whose uniform none of them were ashamed to wear. He thought that in the work of the parishes, in going down the closes in cities and into such places, it would be a good thing that people should say, “There is a man who is a minister of the Church of Scotland; he is doing his work there.”

Mr. Somerville asked, in order that they might understand Mr. Anton, that the amendment should be submitted.

Mr. Anton said that his amendment was that the whole subject of ecclesiastical vestments – the forms, numbers, and decorations of such vestments, with the occasions of their service, be remitted to the Life-and-Work Committee – (laughter) – and that they be called upon to report on the whole matter by the February meeting of Presbytery.

The amendment was not seconded.

Dr. Donald MacLeod pointed out that Mr. Somerville had only suggested how extremely becoming it was that ministers should appear in a manner that was in harmony with the great duty of setting aside a minister for his work. These things did not depend upon clothes, upon gowns or no gowns. None of them thought that. As Mr. Anton had said, it was, no doubt, true that the Church had not prescribed a dress. He hoped the Church never would. The Church in the past had had the great commonsense to leave the matter to the instincts of the ministers. Personally he had only one claim to immortality, and he was afraid it rested upon a fact known to no one but himself, and that was, he was first to introduce what was known as the “dog collar.” (Laughter.) In his youth, 39 years ago, he had introduced it. It was now recognized as the ecclesiastical collar. He hoped that his claim to immortality on that account would be taken notice of by the historians. (Laughter.)

Mr. Robert Thomson moved the previous question. Why, he asked, should the time of the Presbytery be taken up with such absurd matters as the question of clothes? As regarded the matter of going about their parishes or anywhere else with dog collars – (laughter) – he recommended each minister to exercise his own judgment as to what became him best.

The motion of Mr. Somerville was then adopted, Mr. Thomson protesting and appealing [3].

As far historians can tell, there seems to be no dispute that, in fact, the western ecclesiastical collar was a creation of the Scottish Protestant Presbyterians sometime around 1855 according to Doctor Donald MacLeod and the terminology and claim of Latin Papists calling it a “Roman Collar” is in fact a misnomer. As to when Papist clergy adopted this Protestant clerical dress is not really known. However, what is known is that during the Papist Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884, its 77th Decree states:

"We wish therefore and prescribe, that all observe the law of the Church, and that at home or in the church they shall always wear the cassock, which is proper to the clergy. When they go out for duty or relaxation or on a journey, they may use a shorter dress [the business suit with clerical vest and collar], which is to be black in color, and which reaches to the knees, so as to distinguish it from the dress of the laity. We enjoin upon our priests as a matter of strict precept, both at home and abroad, and whether they are residing in their own diocese or outside of it, they shall wear the Roman collar. And because the reason of the ecclesiastical law concerning the clothing of clerics is no less valid for regulars than seculars, regular priests are also bound by law to use either a Roman collar or clothing suitable to distinguish the clergy from the laity" [4].

Within the historical record, at least here in the United States, we can see that Latins adopted this Protestant style of ecclesiastical dress only 29 years since its appearance in Scotland. As we have determined by the historical research, this distinctively western clerical dress was, in fact, created by Protestants and adopted by Papist clerics sometime in the 19th century. However, now we must ask the most important questions which is when and why are Eastern Orthodox Christian clergymen using the this Filioque collar (pejoratively called for its original creation and adoption by adherents of the heresy)?

For Eastern Orthodox Christians, we universally recognize that the traditional ecclesiastical dress for all clergy is the Anteri/Zostikon and the Exorason/Ryasa. The origins of the Orthodox Christian cassock as we know it today is somewhat unknown but is presumed to have originated out of Roman civilization. Presbytera Krista West, an expert in the history and creation of Orthodox liturgical vestments writes of Orthodox clerical dress:

"Liturgical vestments employed by the Orthodox Christian Church in its divine services and rites are drawn from a tradition of immense beauty, rich theological significance, and profound historical continuity. The Church's ongoing usage perpetuates a garment tradition that originates at the very dawn of humanity with the post-lapsarian clothing of Adam and Eve, continues with the prototypical garments of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Palestine, proceeds through classical Greek and Roman attire, and finally culminates and finds a standardized expression in the comprehensive Christian vision of the Byzantine Roman Empire. This is a tradition that has outlasted nations, empires and cultures—a truly remarkable pedigree when one considers that an Orthodox Christian priest today wears garments that have, in their essential type, been in use by mankind in one form or another for over 6000 years. Perhaps even more astonishing is the fact that many of the specific garments of Orthodox liturgical dress have enjoyed an unbroken chain of essentially unaltered design for the past 1500 years, making the prototypes of vestments worn by deacons, presbyters, and bishops today easily recognized in icons dating as far back as the sixth century" [5].

With this beautiful history of Orthodox liturgical vestments and clerical dress, it begs the question as to why Orthodox Christian clergy would even remotely consider wearing the ecclesiastical dress of heretics. The only answer to this is that these modernist clergy have purposefully rejected the Orthodox Christian clerical tradition and wish to not differentiate themselves or set themselves apart as Orthodox Christian clergymen. This practice has its origins predominantly within the ecumenist heresy and modernist practices. The excuses that these modernist clergy who have adopted the tradition of these heretical confession use is that they want to: blend in with everyone else, do not want to offend the heretics with our distinctly Eastern Orthodox Christian dress, or that it scares off people who would otherwise feel that they could approach a priest wearing the filioque collar rather than our traditional ecclesiastical attire. Of course, these strawmen arguments are not founded in the reality of Orthodoxy but are founded in the adoption of the modernism. The filioque collar in our times has been adopted by these modernist clergy as their new tradition which separates themselves from those they would deem to be traditionalist or, worse, zealots.

For example, during a conference the current Archbishop of the Greek Archdiocese in North America, Elpidophoros (Lambriniadis), says concerning the appearance of priests where he comes from in Constantinople that "priests do not have long beards, do not wear cassocks, do not even wear a cross. We wear suits and ties like modern people. We only have our cassock and our *ρασα* when we go to the church, nowhere else" [6]. Elpidophoros then goes on to state that when he came to the United States he "saw a new phenomenon of a new conservatism in our young [GOARCH] clergy" [7]. During his talk he has a priest, who is dressed like a modernist with a Filioque collar and western ecclesiastical suit, stand up as an example to all in attendance and he then states:



Archbishop Elpidophoros (Lambriniadis) with Modernist Clergy in the Filioque Collar

"The reason that I asked Fr Alexander to stand up before is to remind you what type of clergy my predecessor of Blessed Memory Archbishop Iakovos Promoted. This is the type of clergy I want to bring back to our Church [GOARCH]. Some clergy that prefer the long beard and the more traditional appearance tell me 'Your Eminence, we're in a free country. Nobody bothers us if we have a cassock in public [when] we walk around' I say 'of course you are right. This is true. Nobody will ask you why you have a beard or a cassock in public, but you know, they will respect you, but they will never think that you belong to the American culture. They will always think you're something exotic, respected but you don't belong here. They won't insult you... this is the beauty of American culture, that's why they love America, but the question for me is how relevant I want my clergy to be in American Society: do I choose to be a respected exotic person, or do I want to be a relevant person to the average American. And then I want my clergy to be adopted, to be accepted by all Americans not as a something strange that I respect, but something that is relevant to me; that he is relevant. That's what I promote. And of course, there are clergy who wore their cassocks in public over 20 years now. I cannot force them to take off their *ρασα*. I can't do that. I respect that they are used to this their whole lives. But the new generations, [...] have to come back to Archbishop Iakovo's heritage that we had" [8].

Here, we have to ask ourselves, what is the true Orthodox Christian response to the words spoken by the Arch-Heresiarch Elpidophoros and those modernist clergy like him? The answer is we look to the canons and to the saints. In the Canons of the Council of Trullo we read in the 27th Canon, that those in the catalog of the clergy (Readers, Subdeacons, Deacons, Priest and Bishops) are required to wear the clothing assigned to their respective rank. The canon reads: "None of those who are in the catalogue of the clergy shall wear clothes unsuited to them, either while still living in town or when on a journey: but they shall wear such clothes as are assigned to those who belong to the clergy. And if anyone shall violate this canon, he shall be cut off for one week" [9].

As the above history has shown, the Filioque collar is a late 19th century Protestant creation, Papist adaptation and not acceptable as "clothes [...] assigned to those who belong to the clergy" [11]. In looking to the lives of saints, we seek the wisdom of our contemporary saints as they have had to broach this subject in our present time, since it is the recent modernist clergy who have attempted to abandon the traditional dress of their office. These saints have explicitly rejected the abandonment of the cassock for any of the western ecclesiastical styles.



"I'm from Constantinople... In Constantinople priest do not have long beards, do not wear cassocks, do not even wear a cross. We wear suits and ties."

Saint Paisios for example in the well-known story from his life by Greonda Isaac recounts in the story entitled Cassocks and an Olive Tree that:

"People were discussing changing the way clergy dressed, and some clergymen wanted the Saint to bless them to stop wearing their cassocks. For example, one visiting priest insisted, 'The cassock does not make the priest. It is better for clergy not to wear cassocks in public - then people can approach them more easily.' He said other, similar nonsense as well, and the Elder could not convince him to the contrary. Finally, he told the priest, 'Come back tomorrow, and I will give you an answer.'

That night he prayed, and when the priest returned in the morning, he showed him an olive tree that he had stripped of its bark. At the top, he had left some trimmed branches, so that the tree looked a little like a priest with no cassock and just a small beard. 'Do you like the tree like this, with no bark?' he asked the priest. 'That is what clergy are like without cassocks.' The priest left thanking the Elder, who with this simple example had made him discard his worldly ideas.'

On the bare trunk of the olive tree, he carved the two rhymes, translated, 'Priest cassockless - therefore prodigal, and 'The tree cast of their garb - we will see what progress they will make... Of course, the tree later died, but in the meantime many people were able to learn from it, and the Elder would use the vivid image to oppose anti-traditional tendencies in general. Years later, a well-intentioned prospective clergyman asked the Elder why clergy should wear cassocks. He replied, "There are a lot of reasons. But it is enough to say that it comforts reverent people to see their priest in cassocks" [11].

Another example of Saintly wisdom concerning the proper dress of Orthodox clergymen and the maintaining of Orthodox Tradition we can read in the Spiritual Councils of Saint Paisios. The following questions were posed to Saint Paisios concerning the Orthodox clergy wearing traditional Orthodox Christian attire and not those innovations of 19th century Protestants:

– Geronda, there is this expression, "Is it really the cassock that makes the priest?"

Well, think of two olive trees, one with leaves and the other without. Which one do you prefer? Once when I was at the Kalyvi of the Holy Cross, I peeled the trunk of an olive tree and wrote this on it, "The trees got rid of their garments; it's time to see the fruit of their labor!" Next to that I wrote, "A priest without his cassock (arasotos) is a priest without redemption (asotos)."

– Geronda, someone brought an Orthodox priest wearing only trousers [without his cassock] to the monastery. Should we have asked for his blessing?

What blessing? You should have told the person who brought him, no matter how important he was, “Forgive us, but it is a rule in our monastery to give cassocks to priests who are not wearing one. To have a priest come to an Orthodox women’s monastery wearing only his trousers! That is inappropriate.” When the person who brought him has no shame, and when the priest himself is not ashamed for having come without his cassock, why should you be embarrassed to ask him to put one on? I once met a young archimandrite wearing laymen’s clothing at an airport. He was going abroad and introduced himself, “I am Father so and so,” he said. “Where is your cassock?” was my answer. Of course, I did not prostrate in front of him.

– Geronda, some people claim that a modernized clergy will be better able to help people.

When Patriarch Demetrios visited the seminary of the Holy Cross in the United States, a few pious American students went up to him and said, “Your Holiness, don’t you think it’s time for clergy to be more up to date?” The Patriarch’s response was, “Saint Cosmas said that when clergy turn into laymen, laymen will turn into demons.” Wasn’t that a good answer? Then they prepared this luxurious suite for him with a fancy bed and so on. The moment he saw it, he said, “Is this where I am supposed to stay, in this room? You’d better bring me a simple cot. When a clergyman becomes worldly, he becomes the devil’s candidate” [12].

As we can see from the brief historical overview on the invention of the Filioque collar by Scottish Calvinist Presbyterians to the adoption of it by the Latin Papists in the late 19th century, this western ecclesiastical attire has no origin whatsoever in the tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church and is not endorsed by either the canons or the contemporary saints who have time and again condemned the practice of abandoning the traditional Orthodox cassock for the suit created by those outside the Body of Christ. Adhering to the tradition as Orthodox clergy and as laity encouraging our clergy to do the same is a small part on how we can all “stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught” [13].

References

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[3] Ibid.

[4]. Archiepiscopo Jacobo Gibbons, *Acta Et Decreta Concilii Plenarii Baltimorensis Terttii: Caput VIII: De Vita Et Honestate Clericorum* (Baltimore: Typis Joannis Murphy Et Sociorum, 1884), 41

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[6]. "Archbishop Elpidophoros supports offering of Holy Communion to everyone married in Orthodox Church – His views on priests' appearance," *Greek News: Greek-American Weekly Newspaper*, accessed February 9th, 2023,
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[8]. Ibid.

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[10]. Ibid.

[11]. Hieromonk Isaac, *Saint Paisios of Mount Athos* (Chalkidiki: Holy Monastery of Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, 2016), 199-200.

[12]. *Saint Paisios of Mount Athos, Spiritual Counsels: With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man*, Volume I (Thessaloniki: 2019), 358-359.

[13]. 2 Thessalonians 2:15, NJKV.

